The 19th-Century American Tale
Circulated and reprinted in magazines and gift-book anthologies, the tale offered entrée to the nascent mass marketplace of print for many nineteenth-century writers—Poe, Hawthorne, Sedgwick, Davis, James, Chesnutt, Jewett, Chopin, Wharton—and supplied income, fame, or notoriety for many more. Using digital and material archives, we will consider the tale as a marker and maker of changing conditions of authorship, publishing, circulation and reception across the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Pursuing the genre’s dual nature—as a scrappy, commercial, popular culture artifact in the nineteenth century and as a site for innovative literary theory in the twentieth—this seminar explores the tale’s descent from European Romanticism, its narrative echoes of an imagined oral past, its self-reflexive preoccupation with the materiality of language and print, its obsessions with ghosts and the fantastic, and its racial and national counter-narratives. Secondary historical and theoretical reading may include works by Roland Barthes, Meredith McGill, J. Hillis Miller, Andrew Piper, Tzvetan Todorov, Dorothea Von Mücke, et al.